

# Prisoners

Duck\_Life

## Prisoners by Duck\_Life

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**Summary:**

Derry's not a nice place to live, Mike knows that. But sometimes nice people end up trapped there with him.

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He meets her in the fall of 2015, and honestly the fact that anyone would purposely move to Derry when they didn't have to be trapped here, that's a miracle in and of itself. That's what he's thinking when he steps inside Joey's Diner and notices the unfamiliar face behind the counter.

The next thing he thinks is that she's beautiful. The waitress looks kind of like Rosario Dawson but plainer, realer, like if Rosario Dawson had a cousin who didn't go into showbusiness and lived a less glamorous existence.

"Hey there." Her name tag says Anna. "What can I get for ya?"

Mike slides onto a barstool in front of her, his messenger bag thumping against his hip as he sits. "Just a coffee, no cream, four sugars," he says, and he can't help but smile back at her.

"Coming right up."

While she's got her back to him, Mike pulls out his notebook and copy of *A History of Derry*, an absolute monster of a book. Anna turns around with the cup of coffee and smirks when she sees the book. "Little light reading?"

"Hm? Oh, yeah," Mike says, smiling back at her. "It's just kind of... an interest of mine. The history of this town."

Her big brown eyes sparkle as she sets the coffee on the counter beside him. "Have you learned anything interesting?"

His mind flips through a card catalogue of the things he's learned in the past years of research. The Ironworks explosion, the gang violence, the disappearing settlers. Not exactly the kind of stuff he wants to share with a friendly waitress just trying to make conversation.

"Well, this place," he starts, "the diner. It used to be a drugstore back in the fifties, like the kind with a soda bar and a lunch counter. Had a

jukebox.”

“We have a jukebox.”

Mike looks over his shoulder at the TouchTunes box with the flashing lights. “Nah, not that digital piece of junk.” She looks mock-offended, a hand over her heart. “No, this place had, like, a real Wurlitzer. A nice one. You could pop a quarter in and play ‘Earth Angel’ by the Penguins, or ‘Only You’ by the Platters.”

“Or ‘What’s New Pussycat?’ twenty-one times?” she suggests.

Mike grins. “With one ‘It’s Not Unusual.’” Anna laughs. “I’m Mike,” he says.

“Well, you already know my name,” she says, tugging at her name tag. “Sometimes I think that’s so unfair, you know? People come in here and they all get to see my name tag but none of them wear name tags. Makes it a lot harder to learn who everyone is in this town.”

“Well,” Mike says, reaching into his messenger bag. He pulls out his work name tag and pins it to his jacket. “Now we’re even.”

“Michael Hanlon,” she reads off. “Derry Public Library, huh?”

“For eight years now.”

“Wow,” she says. “What made you want to be a librarian?”

And, well, that’s a harder question than asking for his name. Truth is, he never *wanted* to be a librarian. It was a necessity. He needed to stay in Derry, and he needed to soak up as much information as he could so they’d all be ready, 27 years down the line. And yet, even though he never wanted to become a librarian, he can’t say he doesn’t like it.

“It was a calling,” he says.

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Mike reads his books and takes his notes and interviews the Derry elders, but his mind keeps wandering back to Anna from the diner. Yeah, he's trapped here. But who's to stay he can't at least try to have a good time?

He starts visiting the diner more and more.

"Hey there," Mike says, striding in toward Anna one afternoon. "Yesterday at the library we were teaching the kids to make bookmarks. I, uh, made this for you." Feeling awkward, he holds out a plastic bookmark with a flower pressed into it.

Anna's face lights up. "That's so sweet," she says, taking it from him. "Now I can stop using old receipts to mark my place."

One day, she's leaning across the counter and stirring sugar into his coffee, trading barbs and jokes with him about how a stodgy old librarian like Mike should really own a jacket with suede elbow patches.

"I should be going," he sighs, glancing down at his watch. He gets more comfortable here in the diner every day he spends here; it feels like one spot of good in a sea of bad.

"Back to the books?" Anna says. "What's a librarian even do these days? With everything automated, I mean. Are you in charge of reshelving and stuff?"

Mike looks at her, wondering how truthful he can be.

"I'm in charge of remembering," he says finally, sounding older than he is. "When everyone else forgets, forgets our history, forgets where we've been, I remember. And I try to help everyone else remember. That's what a librarian does."

Something passes between them then, something real. Mike gets the sudden, intense feeling that even though Anna doesn't really know what he's talking about, she knows who he is. She sees him, really sees him, and he feels like even though he's trapped here, at least he's not forgotten. At least he matters to someone.

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It's a cold morning in December, and Mike's sitting in the diner sipping coffee and making conversation with Anna and sliding through the news timeline on his phone. All bad news, now, with everyone buzzing about the awful killing of Adrian Mellon a few weeks before.

And there's a familiar prickling at the nape of Mike's neck that won't go away, a prickling that reminds him of dark, dank sewers and the house on Neibolt and glowing yellow eyes.

"So," Anna says to him, "I've... I've got this French press at my apartment." Mike looks up at her, warmth growing in his stomach and chest like the first hot cup of coffee on Christmas morning. "Makes a helluva brew, better than the crap we have here. Do you maybe want to come over and try it?"

He does. He wants to go to Anna's apartment and drink gourmet coffee and see her in socks and comfy clothes, curled up on the couch and maybe there's a heated blanket that they're snuggling under and maybe they're watching *It's A Wonderful Life* or even *Elf*, he wants that.

But then he looks down at his phone and sees the number one trending video in Maine, a ten-second clip that's making the rounds on Twitter. **Creepy Clown Sighting On Bridge— NOT FAKE**.

Mike's heart pounds. He knows it's not fake.

"I... I have to go," he says, slinging his messenger bag over his shoulder. "I'm sorry," he tells Anna, who looks surprised and kind of shaken. "I'm sorry. I have to go." He hurries out of Joey's Diner, bag bouncing on his hip, cell phone in hand.

He has six phone calls to make.

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The year bleeds into 2016 and Mike makes arrangements. It's a lot easier to get weapons when you're 39 than when you're 12, and he's

got better firepower than a bolt gun. He tracks down the kids who made the Twitter video and they sound legit to him. He talks to Don Hagarty, the boyfriend of the man who got tossed over the bridge and devoured by Something (by It, Mike knows it was It). Mike makes arrangements, and Mike makes his phone calls.

Five of them come.

Stanley takes a bath and takes an out, leaving behind a pack of Gillette razor blades and a widow and Mike blames himself for that, always will. Maybe he shouldn't have called Stan first, or maybe he shouldn't have called him at all.

Maybe none of them are supposed to be here, and he should've just sucked it up and gone down to the sewers by himself. They made a promise, sure, but what did they know? They were kids. The promise Mike made later, the promise to stay trapped here in Derry, that's the one that counted.

It's good to see them again, though, Bill and Bev and Ben and Eddie and Richie. They catch up, they *remember*, they get ready. As the weeks pass, Mike finds his thoughts drifting to Anna and the diner, but he pushes those thoughts away. This is the job, his real calling. This is what he stayed in Derry to do.

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Finally, they're ready. They've got their wits and weapons, and they're ready. Bill pulls them into a huddle outside the house on Neibolt and tells them, stuttering as he speaks, that they won before and they can win again, and as long as they stick together it's going to be okay, and yadda yadda.

Mike's thinking a little more realistically. He knows he might die. Actually, he thinks it's likely. And he's made his peace with that, as much as anyone can. He thinks about Don Hagarty and Anna and the kids at the library, and he thinks to himself that if they can stop It, they can save the town.

Derry's a hellhole, sure, but there are good people here. Mike's made

his peace with the fact that he might have to die for them.

But, he suddenly realizes standing there outside the house on Neibolt, he doesn't want to die without at least saying goodbye.

"Bill," he interrupts. "Guys, um... listen, I'll be right back, okay?"

He doesn't wait for them to ask any questions, he just turns and sprints.

Mike can't run as fast as Eddie, but he's no slouch. He runs like a kid again, hopping over a fire hydrant and skidding around the corner, feeling the wind rush up to graze the sides of his face. He runs and runs, finally his sneakers pounding into the pavement outside the shopping strip downtown, he passes the movie theater and the pharmacy and there, finally, there's Joey's Diner.

Mike goes inside, panting, his heart thudding, and he spots Anna standing behind the counter. She turns, surprised and happy to see him but a little worried at his disheveled appearance. "Mike, what—"

But he's in front of the counter then, bathed in the smell of coffee and lemony disinfectant and Anna's hair. Without really thinking about it, Mike leans over the counter and kisses her, lost in the feeling of her lips against his. Even with his eyes closed, Mike knows they must look spectacular, like some old Hollywood couple in their big romance scene.

After this, he has to go back to the sewers, back to the nightmares, and face the thing he's been reading about and running from for 27 years. But now, right now at this second, he's kissing Anna and it's amazing.

"The truth is," Mike tells her when they've broken apart, Anna's eyes shining and her mouth a round "O" of surprise, "I would've stayed in Derry just for your smile."

It's cheesy but it's true, Anna could make him forget that he was more a prisoner of this town than a resident. Anna and her smile made it all worth it.

Mike sees that smile as he leaves, walking backward out the door so



he doesn't have to take his eyes off of her. Her mouth's smiling but her eyes look worried, like she knows he's going off to war and he might not come back.

Mike waves to her a little, still caught in the memory of her lips and the taste of maple syrup that clung to them. Anna waves back, and then finally Mike has to turn around and leave, back to the sewers, back to the past, down once more.